

Cucumbers and the Pickle Craze of Lehi

Mount Pickle Factory

By John K. Haws Jr.

When you see pictures of the little country stores at the turn of the century, it brings a feeling of hominess and pleasant well-being. We usually see a game of checkers going on and by the game is a barrel of pickles. Of all things we would associate with these stores but the barrel of pickles.

Pickles bring out a lot of emotion in me. I do not like pickle slices on my Hamburgers. I not only do not like them, I despise them. Every fast food place we beg that they not put pickles on the hamburgers. About 70 % of the time at least one of the hamburgers comes out with the pickle on them. This just gets me so riled and I have to pull them off. Pickles bring the worst out of me.

But then Pickles also bring out some pleasant emotions of well-being and love. I always love going to a Deli across this country. Most sandwiches come with a pickle either whole or wedge. It sits along side the sandwich and is so crisp and has the most pleasing color. I always love picking up the slice and eating it whole in my mouth. I love the feeling of eating that pickle.

Pickles also bring out a feeling of nostalgia. I spent a lot of time in the Brown Home. Jimmy always had one of the best gardens in the community. It always had several mounds of well producing cucumbers. When the crop started coming in, JoAnn would have several large pickle crocks that she would fill with cucumbers, vinegar and the appropriate spices to fill the air which would clear up any problems with sinuses. I would go and see the crocks full of those pickles and really feel that all was well.

I also obtained that same feeling as our adopted grandmother Helen Christensen would offer us her home produced delicacies. She was known for her

Bread and Butter Pickles and her mustard pickles. We would always love enjoying her specialties. The eating of these pickles would always bring such a sense of love and gratitude. We would save these bottles for the most special of times.

Cucumbers brought emotions in Lehi in the first two decades of the 1900's. In 1906, Mr. Mount of the Mount Pickle Company came to Lehi and met with the Lehi Commercial Club and other interested people of the City. The Deseret News of February 23, 1906 reported that they made a proposition to have the farmers and gardeners here raise cucumbers for Mt. Pickle Factory.

The Deseret News further reported that He is offering \$20 per ton for cucumber 1-4 inches long and 50 cents per hundredweight for cucumbers from 4-5 inches long, however, only a limited number of the latter will be purchased.”

It further reported : As eight to fifteen tonis, is a good crop, \$160 to \$300 worth will be produced on each acre, which would mean that something over \$12,000 would be produced here.”¹

The Commercial Club agreed to a \$350 payment when the facility was completed. The Mount Pickle Company went to work and built a facility on the State Street. A large frame building was built just south of the pump house near the Salt Lake Route railroad depot. It was surrounded by huge salting vats. ²

The July 6, 1906 Deseret News reported “While the growing of pickles is a new thing to Lehi, the cucumber vines are showing up nicely, and there is every promise that a large crop will be harvested.”³

This caused the cucumber craze of Lehi. People all over the community changed out their garden spots and acreage to Cucumbers. Cliff Austin reported that “Everybody seemed to have a few cucumbers in their lot... I put an acre in and

¹ Deseret News February 23, 1906.

² Deseret News July 6, 1906

³ Deseret News July 6, 1906

the kids couldn't pick enough to pay for their wages. It takes an awful lot to get a hundred pounds, and they were cheap.⁴

In one year, the people of Lehi produced a bunch of cucumbers. In the Lehi Banner of February 7, 1907 it reported that "Andrew Jacobs has shipped two cars of pickles from the Salting Station to the Mount Pickle Factory company in Salt Lake."⁵

Esther Hebrew reported that she too was involved in the Cucumber craze in Lehi. She worked hard raising cucumbers for years so she could buy herself a bike.⁶ Cucumbers almost seemed to take over the sugar beet as the crop of Lehi. Flower beds were changed to Cucumber plants as all the empty fields.

In 1908, it was reported that "The Mount Pickle company of Salt Lake is sending out letters to farmers and gardeners here (Lehi) offering them \$5 per ton for cucumbers; also prices if they desire to grow cabbage, cauliflower, etc. The past two years, it has been paying \$4 per ton for cucumbers and some have done very well in growing them at these prices. There is no doubt many will grow them at the increased price. The company has a storage station here (Lehi) which was built three years ago."⁷

Richard Van Wagoner wrote that "By 1914, the Mount Pickle Factory was owned by the Capital Pickle Company of Salt Lake City. The firm, under the management of Andrew Jacobs, operated seven large pickle vats, each twelve feet in diameter and ten feet high. These tanks were filled with small cucumbers, while the larger onew used to make dill pickles were placed in fifty gallon drums filled with brine. The dill used in the plant's operation was grown on the company's property near the railroad depot"⁸

⁴ Oral History of Cliff Austin performed by the John Hutchings Museum.

⁵ Lehi Banner February 7, 1907

⁶ Oral History of Esther Hutchings Hebrew performed by the John Hutchings Museum

⁷ Deseret News Feb. 1, 1908.

⁸ Lehi State Street Series by Richard Van Wagoner.

During 1914, the farmers were learning to produce more per acre. In the Banner of this year, John Smith reported that during the month of August, he picked eleven thousand pounds of small cukes and seven thousand pounds of larger ones. His check for the month was \$175.⁹

With the depression, the plant went out of business, but the company kept purchasing Lehi cucumbers. The cucumber craze had come to a close. There is no large farms still producing cucumbers.

So today, I pull out a large crisp dill and like the Vlastic Pelican of commericals, I put the pickle in my mouth like a cigar and relish every bite. Yes I have the Lehi Craze for pickles...it is in my blood.

⁹ Lehi Banner September 5, 1914,